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ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the School Team Approach for changing perceptions of the school climate and the level of victimization in 290 middle, junior high, and high schools used student and teacher questionnaires adapted from those used in the Safe School Study. In pre-intervention tests, students and teachers in middle and junior high schools generally reported higher levels of problems than did their counterparts in high schools. In middle and junior high schools the students' perceptions of danger were related to student-teacher alienation. However, among high school students and among teachers at all secondary levels, perceptions of danger were related to the character of the neighborhood in which their schools were located. Evaluation of the interventions indicated that the objectives of the team program were more important in determining outcomes than were the strategies used. It was also found that changes in student behavior could be obtained either by working directly with students or with the adults around them. Finally, the evaluation results indicated that different situations must be met with different intervention techniques. (Author/PGD)

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The School Team Approach: Issues in School Change

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The School Team Approach: Issues in School Change[1]

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This paper:

- describes one approach to coping with problems of crime and disruption in the schools,
- suggests some factors that appear important in ways of thinking about the nature of school crime and disruption, and
- presents some initial findings on the efficacy of different intervention strategies.

The School Team Approach

Training in the School Team Approach has been carried out for the past seven years by Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education Program (ADAEP) in the U.S. Education Department through five regional training centers. Briefly, the School Team Approach is an effort to build local competence to deal with local problems. Implementation of the Approach begins with recruitment of a school whose administrator is concerned about given problems and committed to efforts to do something about them. Two weeks of residential training is provided to a school-selected team consisting of seven persons drawn from both school and community and including the school's principal or another administrator. The training is intended to help the team develop as an effective and cohesive work unit and to assist team members in assessing specific needs in their school, designing strategies to address these needs, and developing an action plan to carry out the strategies. There are varying amounts of input on specific interventions that might be of help. Follow-up technical assistance and training is made available to the team during the months following residential training.

[1]Prepared for "Delinquency prevention: what can schools do?", symposium presented at American Educational Research Association meeting, Los Angeles, 4-13-81.

This is a low-cost program. Monies are made available to the school to cover costs incurred during residential training and to pay for the part-time services of a team leader. The intent of the Team Approach is to serve as a catalyst for initiating an ongoing change process in the school, not an external source of program support.

There are some common themes underlying this approach to school problems. It is concerned more with primary prevention than with remediation. There is a commitment to the capacity of local people to develop appropriate solutions to local problems. Though the training centers differ among themselves in their interests and emphases, as do the trainers within them, the training system is generally informed with what it describes as a humanistic stance, creating a more humane environment for students to learn and teachers to teach; and it promotes the participation of all groups in the school system, including students, in developing prevention efforts.

The program has been modified through the years on the basis of accumulated experience and external changes. There is increasing emphasis on systems change as the key to individual behavior change. There has also developed a cluster effort which brings several teams within a school district together under the leadership of a district-level cluster coordinator.

Because of the emphasis on local action, intervention efforts of the school teams vary widely in practice and, despite strong trainer efforts to get team members to be explicit about the rationales that link strategies for change to problems to be addressed, they tend to be atheoretical, multi-theroretical, or fuzzy-theoretical.

The Nature of the Crime and Disruption Problem

The School Team Approach was developed in response to problems of drug and alcohol abuse, but, because of its primary prevention emphasis, it is equally applicable to other school problems. Social Action Research Center (SARC) became involved as evaluators of the application of the Team Approach to a group of schools concerned with problems of crime and disruptive behavior.[1] We initially followed a group of 80 middle and high school teams trained in the spring of 1977 to assess the impact of the team intervention over the course of a year (Phase 1 study). We have since been following two additional groups of elementary, middle, and high school teams, 135 trained in 1977-78 and 75 trained in 1978-79 (Phase 2 study).

The evaluation has involved assessing changes in victimization and school climate as reported by both students and teachers in these schools. The instruments are student and teacher questionnaires adapted from those used in the Safe School Study. We developed four measures of problem level in the schools, each based on scores from two or more scales:

Student measures:	Climate	students' fear in the school perceived danger in the school perceived level of school disruption prevalence of illegal behaviors perceived victimization of teachers by students
	Victimization	student reports of personal victimization student reports of property victimization

[1] Through a grant from the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. ADAEP received monies from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (through an interagency agreement with the then Office of Education) to support team training.

Teacher measures:	Personal safety	teachers' fear in the school perceived safety from personal attack perceived level of school disruption teacher reports of personal victimization student reports to teachers of personal victimization
	Property safety	perceived safety from property theft/damage teacher reports of property victimization teacher reports of car theft/damage student reports to teachers of property victimization

There are substantial correlations among the component scales, which justify the creation of these summary measures. When many students in a school report a high level of fear, many students tend to report that the school is dangerous, disruptive, and so on. But when we look at different kinds of schools, we find that the pattern of scale scores is not the same from one group to another, and the correlates of these problem measures are also different.

In common with the Safe School study, we found that both students and teachers in the junior highs/middle schools report higher levels of problems on summary measures than do their high school counterparts. This is not true on all of the individual scales (see Figures 1 and 2). Middle school students and their teachers report a more disruptive learning environment and more instances of personal and property victimization (other than car damage and theft) than do students and teachers in high schools. Incidents are more frequently reported to the principal's office (with the exception of those involving alcohol or drug use, both more common in the high schools).[1] Middle school students are also more likely to report their personal victimization to teachers. However, student reports of rule-breaking and illegal behaviors by others (stealing, selling stolen goods, carrying weapons) are at the same level in high and middle schools. (These patterns, based on Phase 1 pre-test data, were

[1] Incident reports kept by the principal's office as part of this study.

essentially replicated in the Phase 2 pre-test data; see Figures 3 and 4. The Phase 2 elementary schools show patterns similar to, though not identical with, the middle schools.)

There is substantial agreement between students and teachers in both middle and high schools on the level of perceived safety of their schools. Middle school students differ from their teachers, however, in the kinds of schools in which they feel unsafe, and they also differ from the older high school students.

The proportion of middle school students who are afraid in school and who perceive their school as a dangerous place is far higher than in high schools. Perception of danger is related to the level of student and teacher alienation. When large numbers of students do not care about the school nor about each other and when large numbers of teachers have given up on students and are concerned mainly with control of student behavior, that school is likely to be seen as unsafe by middle school students. Schools with a large percentage of minority students are also seen as unsafe, as are schools in which there has been frequent turnover of principals.

We should think about the developmental problems faced by students in the middle school years. They are in transition from childhood to adolescence. They are dealing with new roles, new feelings, new perceptions of themselves, and growing expectations for independence. They may begin to question the caring and controlling behavior of adults, though the need for both caring and control is not diminished.

Within this framework we can understand why younger students see increased danger in school settings lacking consistent adult leadership, in which teachers care little about students, and in which there is little peer support but large

potential for socially-determined inter-group rivalries.

High school students, on the other hand, are more likely to feel unsafe in schools located in neighborhoods in which crime and poverty are high. This is also true of teachers, in both high and middle schools; it is not true of middle school students. Thus for both older students and adults the problem of school safety appears to be embedded in the larger context of safety in the neighborhood. For younger students it is linked to the interpersonal environment of the school.

Though middle school teachers work in a more disruptive environment and are more likely to be victimized than high school teachers, there is little difference between them in their perception of the level of safety in their schools. Middle school teachers are no more often afraid in school and less frequently report their victimization to administration. The younger students are, of course, less of a physical threat to teachers. It may also be that middle school teachers, responding to the needs of their students, more readily assume a nurturing rather than adversary role and are less threatened by opposition and defiance.

This discussion is not presented as definitive, but rather to make the point that the problem of "crime in the schools" does not necessarily lie on a single dimension. There are a limited number of ways of dealing with stress, particularly for young people, and similar behaviors may reflect different needs and convey different messages. Making schools safer may present a different problem for younger than for older students, and a different problem for students than for teachers. We should also be prepared to find that what is an appropriate intervention to make students feel (and be) safer may depend upon the age of the student, the kind of school she or he attends, and

the kind of neighborhood in which the school is located; and that interventions that have an impact on what students report about their school may not necessarily result in reported teacher change.

We have not had the time or funds to move beyond this crude correlational analysis to the more interesting question of differences in the perceptions of different sub-groups of students and teachers within the same school to what is ostensibly a common problem, though we know from our early scale development work that different demographic groups of students and of teachers do not perceive the school in the same way.[1] Younger students, for example, tend to report more fear and see the school as more dangerous than older students, and this gradient operates within both middle and high schools. Social structure variables interact with developmental ones.

Interventions and Change

Let us turn now to some Phase 1 data on change in reported school safety and its relationship to the targets of change, the kinds of settings in which change is sought, and the kinds of interventions used to bring it about.

Who changes. In both middle and high schools, students and teachers tended to agree substantially on the level of problem in their school. After a year of team intervention, we found no relationship between student and teacher perception of changes in the level of school safety within the high schools, and only a modest relationship between student and teacher perceptions of change in the middle schools (Table 1). The amount of student change was related to the effectiveness of the team intervention; the amount of teacher change was not.

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[1] Joffe is presenting some interesting data in this symposium on the dimensions of victimization for different groups of students and teachers.

Table 1

Correlations between Student and Teacher Measures

Teacher pre-test measures	Student pre-test measures: Climate HS	Climate MS	Victimization HS	Victimization MS
Personal safety	59**	64**	-04	44*
Property safety	44**	30	13	38*

Teacher change measures	Student change measures: Climate HS	Climate MS	Victimization HS	Victimization MS
Personal safety	-11	29	-16	01
Property safety	-10	26	-10	15

Decimals omitted.
Residual change scores.
** p .001; * p .05.

Where does change occur. Both students and teachers were more likely to report change when the school was initially a relatively "good" school. This may appear obvious. What may not be so obvious is that the definition of "good" appeared to be different for students than for teachers. Students changed more readily in schools in which the interpersonal environment was seen initially as a relatively supportive one--schools in which teachers cared about and had respect for students and students cared about fellow students, teachers, and the school. Teachers changed most readily in schools in which the initial level of crime and disruption was not too high. For both students and teachers, change occurred more readily when there had been little turnover in the principal position. The importance of consistent leadership was confirmed by a group of case studies.

What programs work best. Some programs appeared to more effective than others, but what was effective depended upon the setting in which it was tried and who

was the reporter of change. Differences in program effectiveness could not be explained by differences in the effectiveness of the teams that tried them.

Since not all program interventions were tried in all kinds of schools, we can offer only tentative hunches about what seems to work best where, and with whom. First, two comments about the interventions generally. Our data suggest that the objectives of a program (for example, clarifying expectations for behavior, improving human relations skills) are more important in determining outcome than the specific stragegies used to reach those objectives. A specification of team "objectives" was as close as we could come to defining differences in theoretical perspectives--as was pointed out earlier, it was difficult to get team members to be clear about the rationales underlying their program efforts.

Though ultimately all intervention efforts were directed toward changing student behavior, change could be sought by working directly with students or by working with the adults around them. In the middle schools it appeared easier to bring about change in student perceptions of the school if program efforts were directed toward students and if students were involved in carrying out the change programs. This did not hold for high schools. However, when there had been frequent turnover in school leadership, interventions directed toward adults were associated with student reports of positive change in both middle and high schools.

Let us now turn very briefly, and for purposes of illustration, to the problems for change posed by different settings.

When problems of crime and disruption are high--in the middle schools generally and in the high problem high schools--programs aimed at structuring expectations for student behavior tended to show positive change, as reported by students,

and, in the middle schools, by teachers as well.

When many students are failing, programs that reinforce their roles as students (motivating them to attend school, increasing their academic skills) appeared to be more effective than others in bringing about reports of change by students (and by teachers in the middle schools), though such programs, over the range of schools as a whole, were associated with poor outcomes. Efforts to promote non-academic involvement in school or to improve relationships among groups within the school did not work well in such settings.

When student and teacher alienation is high--note that this is a more complex problem than school failure--efforts to actively involve students in program interventions and a direction of program efforts toward students were related to student reports of positive change. Such efforts may serve as indicators to students that adults are concerned about them and value them as individuals. Teachers in such schools, however, reported more positive change when programs emphasized traditional approaches to school problems: improving academic performance, motivating students to attend school, clarifying expectations for behavior. Teacher alienation is linked to perception of poor student performance. Thus, efforts to improve that performance may be seen as an indication that this problem is being met.

The point to be made by these examples is this. There are common needs among students and teachers, but the strength and salience of these needs is not the same for all groups, nor for any one group across time and across settings. The data suggest that it is important to address some needs before others can be effectively met. There must be a minimum of order, safety, and predictability in the school environment for students and teachers to be able to function, and there must be a sense that someone is in charge. Once this is established,

attention can be given to the integrity of the educational enterprise. Only then does it appear useful to expand existing roles--to provide opportunities to participate in decision-making, to explore relationships with others, to develop skills in dealing with other people. To the extent that this interpretation of the data is true, it argues for designing situationally specific interventions, and possibly sequential strategies in implementing them.

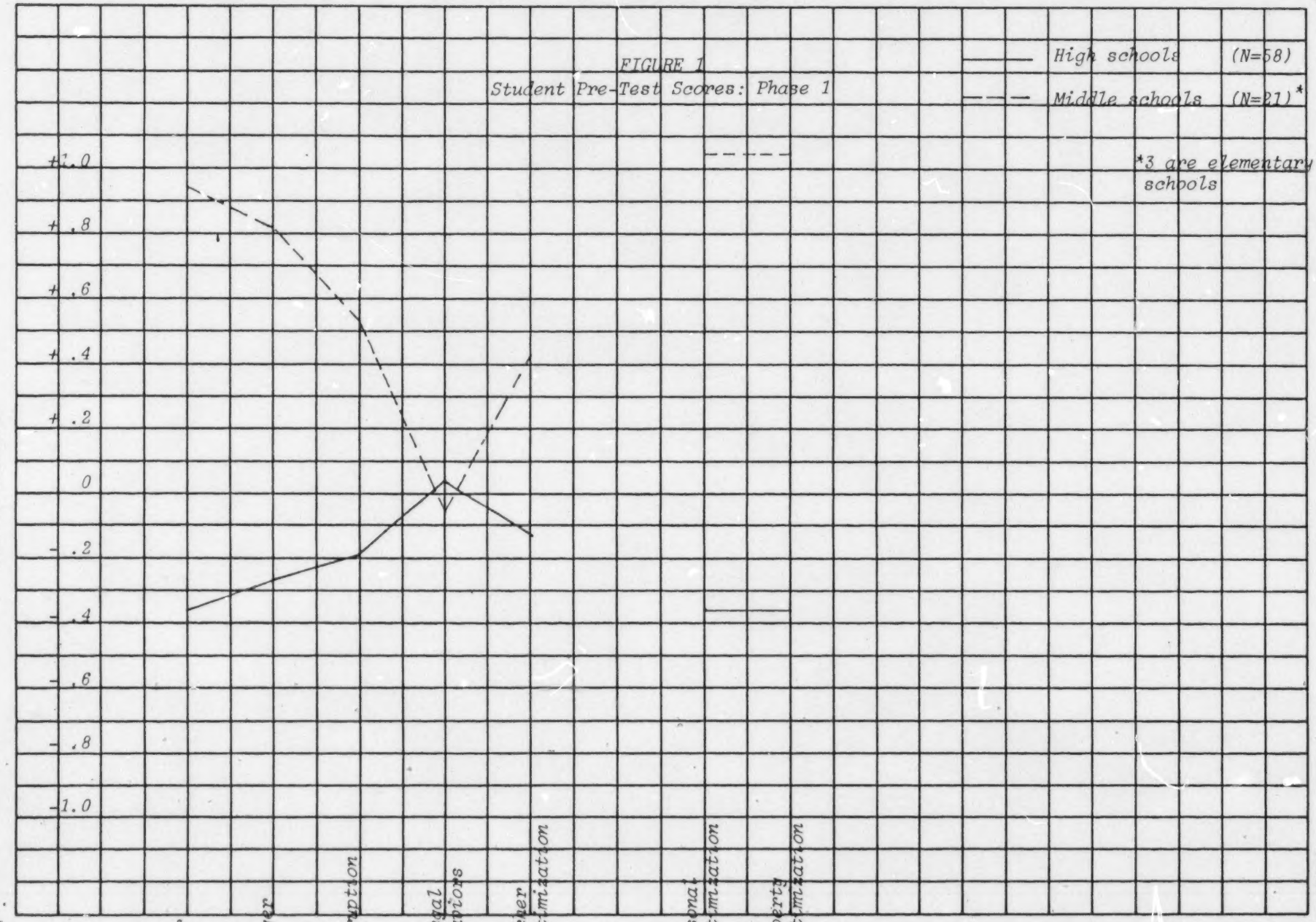
FIGURE 1
Student Pre-Test Scores: Phase 1
High schools (N=58)
Middle schools (N=21)*
*3 are elementary schools
Standard scores
+1.0
+ .8
+ .6
+ .4
+ .2
0
- .2
- .4
- .6
- .8
-1.0
Fear
Danger
Disruption
Illegal behaviors
Teacher victimization
Personal victimization
Property victimization

FIGURE 2

Teacher Pre-Test Scores: Phase 1

——— High schools

– – – – Middle schools

Standard scores

+1.0
+ .8
+ .6
+ .4
+ .2
0
- .2
- .4
- .6
- .8
-1.0

Fear

Personal safety

Disruption

Personal victimization

Student personal victimization

Property safety

Property victimization

Car theft/ damage

Student property victimization

FIGURE 3

Student Pre-Test Scores: Phase 2

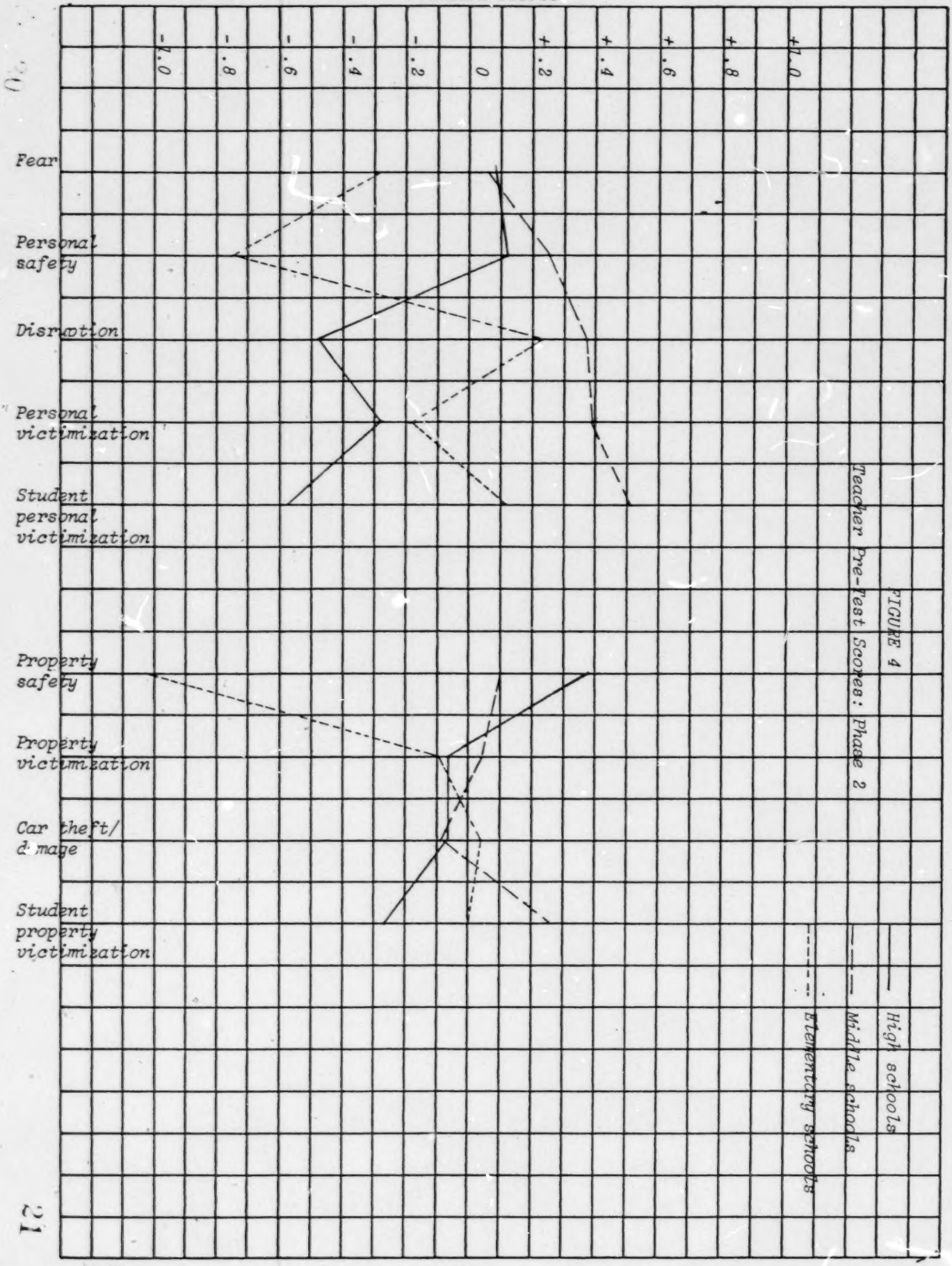

FIGURE 4

Teacher Pre-Test Scores: Phase 2

——— High schools

— — — Middle schools

------ Elementary schools